

FIRST THINGS FIRST

Southwest Maricopa Region

IMPACT REPORT 2021



FirstThingsFirst.org/Regions/Southwest-Maricopa

90%

of a child's brain growth happens before kindergarten.

Early childhood matters.

First Things First partners with families and communities to help our state's youngest children prepare for kindergarten and beyond.

Many young children in Arizona face challenges that threaten their healthy development and learning. In the FTF Southwest Maricopa Region, there are **28,512 children** (under age 6) with **16% living in poverty**.

Here is how FTF is working to support young children and their families in this region.

“The future success of our children begins with the small things that we do every day in the home, and it's never too early to start. If we want the children of Arizona and our nation to be successful, we need to provide the tools and support services necessary for parents and caregivers. I support First Things First, because it provides these tools and programs.”

Aaron White

Vice Chair of FTF Southwest Maricopa Regional Partnership Council

FTF Southwest Maricopa Region Strategic Priorities



Strengthening Families and Early Literacy

Families are a child's first and best teachers. FTF programs in the Southwest Maricopa region give parents choices for how they want to support their child's health and learning. **Family resource centers** in the region offer a wide range of family activities, programs and referrals to additional services, and voluntary **home visiting** programs provide comprehensive, one-on-one support for families with young children. The region also provides parents with free, **evidence-based trainings** designed to improve knowledge of parenting practices and children's development.



Quality Preschool and Child Care

Children who attend high-quality early learning programs go on to do better in school and are more likely to graduate. The Southwest Maricopa region provides funding for child care providers and preschool programs to participate in FTF's **Quality First**. Providers benefit from training, coaching and a wide range of evidence-based supports to improve the quality of their early learning programs in ways that help children learn, grow and thrive. The region also funds **Quality First Scholarships** to help low-income families afford quality early learning for their young children.



Preventive Health

Undetected or untreated health issues can impact learning later on. Left unaddressed, developmental delays and chronic medical conditions can contribute to serious learning problems. FTF works to support the health and development of young children in the Southwest Maricopa region by funding **developmental and sensory screenings** to detect vision, hearing and developmental issues and help prevent later learning challenges. **Fluoride varnishes** are also offered to protect children against childhood tooth decay, a leading cause of school absences.



Mom finds educational and fun resources to prepare her young daughter for kindergarten at Gila Bend Family Resource Center

The Gila Bend Family Resource Center in Gila Bend is a happy place for Dalila Guzman's young daughter, Kiara.

"Anything that has to do with the center she loves," Guzman said. "She knows that she's going to learn something and maybe come home with something."

As a mother of three, Guzman knew children go through fast, dramatic development in the early years—and she wanted to support her daughter, Kiara's growth. Guzman found classes and fun resources at the Gila Bend Family Resource Center, making it a special place for her and her daughter to visit.

Early in Kiara's life, Guzman enrolled in the free family resource center classes available for parents of babies, toddlers and preschoolers.

The First Things First Southwest Maricopa Regional Council funds the family resource center to help support parents of kids birth to age 5 as their child's first teacher.

Located in Gila Bend, this one-stop center provides parenting classes on topics such as early literacy, the importance of play to children's learning and how to deal with challenging behaviors. It also provides many other resources.

In the parenting classes, Guzman appreciated learning how to educate her daughter at home.

"We are their first teachers, that is something I've learned," she said. "You take care of your baby and you meet their physical needs. We don't stop to think about the social and

emotional learning part. This is something that the classes at the resource center can help us with. There is always more that you can do at home. We can be a big part of their education."

After taking the classes, Guzman felt more confident and prepared to help her daughter get ready for kindergarten.

"I also have an 18-year-old and a 12-year-old," she said. "Sometimes I struggled in helping them with their learning, but not with Kiara. I know where I'm going, and I know how to teach her."

Guzman also got her mother and mother-in-law involved at the center in the family, friend and neighbor classes offered to caregivers of young children.

"They were perfectly on-board about receiving information that would help them be better caregivers to benefit Kiara," she said.

Kiara got to take a class, too. She loved attending an 8-week nutrition class on Wednesdays at the center with her mother.

"They taught us about healthy foods and how to eat healthier," Guzman said. "We would play Bingo at the beginning of class, and she was always excited for the game."

And before the COVID-19 pandemic hit, the entire family would attend the frequent health fairs that the center would host. During the pandemic, the center put together take-home packets for families.

"Every month they would choose a theme and put together an activity for kids to do at home with their family and she would bring it home in a Ziploc bag," Guzman said. "They were always literacy-based."

"You take care of your baby and you meet their physical needs. We don't stop to think about the social and emotional learning part."

—Dailila Guzman, parent

When Kiara was 3 years old, Guzman signed up for a parent educator program that she found out about at the center. The home visitor would visit Guzman and Kiara in their home every two weeks.

"She really helped me understand about her development," Guzman said. "Martha was such a natural teacher. I loved to hear her speak because anything she would tell Kiara, she was teaching me how to teach her. It was awesome."

When it was time for Kiara to start kindergarten, Guzman knew she would be ready. Kiara, now 6, is succeeding in school.

"One of the first things they had her do was write her name," Guzman said. "That was really easy for her, because she already knew how to do that. Kiara benefited from everything they had to offer at the resource center."

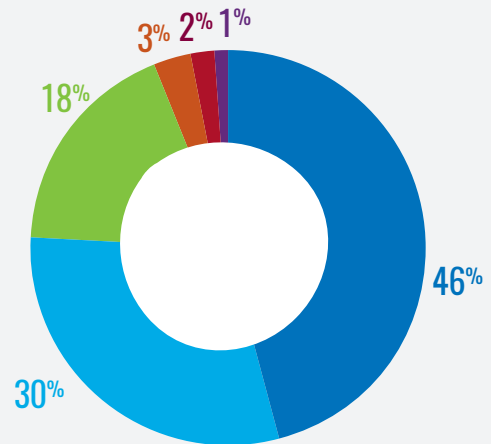
FTF Southwest Maricopa Regional Partnership Council

The FTF Southwest Maricopa Regional Partnership Council is made up of volunteers who study the unique needs of the local community and decide how funds should be used to best support the healthy development and early learning of young children birth to age 5. FTF invests in

proven programs and innovative strategies through grants to community organizations that provide services to children and families. Some programs in this region include Quality First, family resource centers and family, friend and neighbor care.

FTF Southwest Maricopa SFY21 Total Regional Program Expenditures

Quality Child Care and Preschool	\$2,070,165
Strengthening Families	\$1,322,919
Preventive Health	\$787,808
Research and Evaluation	\$158,180
Parent and Community Awareness	\$101,426
Coordinating Care	\$53,843
Total	\$4,494,341



FTF Southwest Maricopa Regional Partnership Council and Staff

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JoEllen Johnson

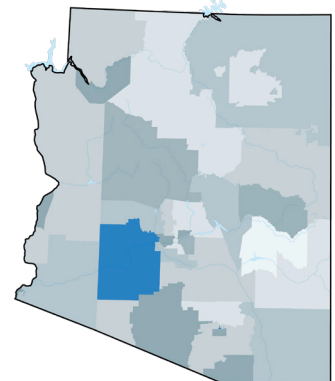
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The **FTF Southwest Maricopa Region** spans 4,325 square miles across the Southwest Valley. The largest region in Maricopa County, it is a predominantly rural area that has been one of the fastest growing population centers in the state. This expansive region includes Avondale, Buckeye, Gila Bend, Goodyear, Litchfield Park, Tolleson and Tonopah. The FTF Southwest Maricopa Region includes Legislative Districts 4, 13 and 19. (Legislative districts are not necessarily congruent with regional boundaries.)

Learn more at
[FirstThingsFirst.org/Regions/Southwest-Maricopa](https://www.FirstThingsFirst.org/Regions/Southwest-Maricopa)